

Message Text

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51

ACTION AID-59

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R 271415 Z JUN 73

FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5262

INFO AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

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E. O. 1163): N/A

TAGS: EAID, DM, NG

SUBJECT: FANCIFUL FLIGHTS IN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

NIAMEY AND DAKAR FOR ADO

1. FAO CHIEF LOGISTICS OFFICER FOR SAHELIAN RELIEF, TREVOR PAGE, ARRIVED COTONOU JUNE 24. HE UNDER MISTAKEN IMPRESSION S. S. SHOMROON HAD NOT YET ENTERED COTONOU PORT TO DISCHARGE 1000 MT SORGHUM DESTINED FOR NIGER. IN ACTUAL FACT, SHIP HAD ALREADY DEPARTED EARLIER IN DAY AFTER LEAVING CARGO. THUS, PAGE'S PLAN TO UNLOAD FROM SHOMROON ADDITIONAL 500 MT DESTINED FOR APAPA DISCHARGE WENT AWRY. HE HAD HOPED USE THIS GRAIN FOR SHIPMENT BY CANADIAN AIRCRAFT TO EASTERN NIGER.

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2. PAGE THEN INSISTED ON GETTING 500 MT FROM CARGO ALREADY DIS-CHARGED FROM S. S. SHOMROON AND BEING LOADED ON RAILWAY WAGONS FOR SHIPMENT TO NIGER. EMBASSY REFUSED PERMISSION FOR TRANSFER THIS CARGO, DESPITE PAGE' S IMPRESSIVE CREDENTIALS AND LIST OF FREINDS IN HIGH PLACES, PENDING INSTRUCTIONS FROM ADO IN NIAMEY WHO PREVIOUSLY HAD VETOED AIR SHIPMENT FOR THIS CARGO. TO REINFORCE EMBASSY DECISION, RESIDENT FAO REP, JEAN- BAPTISTE YONKE, TELEPHONED TO ADVISE STRONGLY AGAINST PAGE' S PLAN FOR AIR SHIPMENT. HE RECOMMENDING WE STICK TO DAHO- NIGER RAILWAY- ROAD SYSTEM, WHICH HAS BEEN OPERATING THROUGHOUT EMERGENCY WITH COMMENDABLE EFFICIENCY FROM COTONOU. HE FEARED THAT " ERRATIC DIVERSION" OF CARGOS COULD HARM HITERTO SPLENDID COOPERATION BY DAHOMEANS (" BEST OF ANY PORT ON THE COAST"), AND MIGHT BE VIEWED AS SIGN OF LACK OF CONFIDENCE.

3. IN ATTEMPT RESOLVE PAGE' S DI EMMA, WE TELEPHONED ADO NIAMEY REACHING FFP OFFICER, GORDON PROUTY. ALLOWING MR. PAGE TO STATE HIS OWN CASE, FOR HE DID SEEM A STRONG, IF EXCITABLE ADVOCATE, WE ENCOURAGED HIM TO SPEAK DIRECTLY TO PROUTY. MR. PROUTY TOLD HIM THAT NONE OF THE ATPPP MT IN COTONOU WOULD BE RELEASED FOR AIR SHIPMENT BECAUSE THE NIGERIEN AUTHORITIES HAD INSISTED ON ITS BEING SHIPPED BY SURFACE. PAGE THEN AGREED TO DIVERT HIS THREATENING EAGLES TO LAGOS WHERE THEY WOULD BE LOADED WITH GRAIN DESTINED FOR EASTERN NIGER.

4. COMMENT: THIS LIMITED EXPOSURE TO FAO ORGANIZATION OF LOGISTICS WOULD SUGGEST NEED FOR CAREFUL, CALM ASSESSMENT OF REQUIREMENTS AND MEANS RATHER THAN ERRATIC RUSHING ABOUT CONTINENTAL- SIZED AREA BY OFFICIAL CLAIMING PLENIPOTENTIARY POWERS. ONE ELEMENT- ARY LESSON IN MARSHALLING FORCES AND RESOURCES SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN FORGOTTEN, I. E. GENERALS MUST NEVER OUTRUN THEIR MEANS OF COMMUNICA- TIONS.

A THIRD LESSON APPARENTLY NEEDING TO BE LEARNED IS THAT FAO' S CATALYTIC AGENTS MUST STAY IN REGULAR TOUCH WITH LOCAL REPS OF DONOR ORGANIZATIONS. VITAL IMPORTANTCE OF SUCH COMMUNICATION WAS MADE CLEAR BY VARYING INTERPRETATIONS OF NIGERIEN WISHES UPON WHICH ACTORS IN THIS LITTLE DRAMA WERE OPERATING. FURTHER MUDDYING OF WATERS OCCURRED WITH PAGE' S FRANTIC INTER- CONTINENTAL TELEPHONE CALLS TO OFFICIALS IN ROME AND WASHINGTON, WITHOUT CONSULTING WITH PEOPLE ON THE SPOT DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE OPERATION. IN SHORT, THE OLD DICTUM OF THOUGH GOVERNING ACTION STILL SEEMS TO APPLY EVEN IN ERA OF THE C-130.

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